TRUE HEROES

OF

PROVINCIAL PENNSYLVANIA.

BY

JULIUS F. SACHSE.

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THE TRUE HEROES

—OF—

PROVINCIAL PENNSYLVANIA.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE

PENNSYLVANIA-GERMAN SOCIETY,

—AT—

MOUNT GRETNA, JULY 18, 1892,

—BY—

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"TRUE HEROES OF PROVINCIAL PENNSYLVANIA."

Gentlemen and fellow members of the Pennsylvania-German Society: The subject of my paper to-day will be the "True Heroes of Provincial Pennsylvania," a theme which you will agree with me is a pertinent one for this occasion.

The general tendency of the addresses before this honorable and similar organizations has mainly been to exalt the prowess of our forefathers in the Revolution; it has been wont to dwell upon their deeds, recount their sufferings, exalt their services and glory in the victories they helped to gain, just as if all the heroism of the German element in Pennsylvania was exemplified within that circumscribed period.

Without wishing for a moment to detract a single iota from the laurels due the actors during the Revolutionary drama, I wish to call your attention to even greater heroism, such as was displayed in innumerable instances among the lowly and humble German population in the early days of the Province. Heroes in every day life, who lived, labored, prayed and died, and now rest in unknown and long-forgotten graves, yet whose influence, brought about by lives of self-denial, survives unto the present day.

It is to these unknown humble heroes in civil life that I wish to pay a slight tribute of respect by calling the attention of the Pennsylvania-German Society to the subject.

As a matter of fact, by far the great majority of German emigrants who came to these shores were of a peaceful disposition; as a matter of record most all were what are classed as "non-combatants," who came to these western wilds as much to exercise their desire for religious liberty as to escape from feudal oppression and a state of religious intoleration then existing in some parts of Germany.

Then again where the English Quaker came to this country from speculative and pecuniary motives, the Scotch-Irishmen for political reasons or preferment, the German came with the avowed intention of founding a permanent home, where he could exercise the dictates of his own conscience.

In carrying out his object the sole dependence of the German settler was prayer and supplication to the Deity, and an unbounded faith and trust in Providence, often in direct contrast to his neighbors who depended mainly upon their own prowess.

It is a curious fact that in all of my travels through this State and in my historical researches I have yet to find the first specimen of firearms or murderous weapons brought over by the original German emigrant, yet there is hardly a Pennsylvania-German family which cannot point with pardonable pride to the German Bible, KATECHISMUS, or GESANGBUCH, still in possession of the family, which formed the chief treasure of the original emigrant, as it proved his comfort in time of sorrow and trial.

Where relics of worldly handicraft still exist—precious heirlooms as they are—they are found to be implements

of peaceful arts, used in the farm economy or the domestic household.

From the earliest days, the Germans in Pennsylvania, partly on account of their retiring disposition, but mainly from the fact of speaking a strange and foreign tongue, were imposed upon by their English-speaking neighbors, and often forced to suffer oppression and indignities, which would have been resented by force by almost any other nationality or race.

This submission to ruthless oppression was not, however, caused by cowardice or lack of manhood, but was the result of the religious teachings learned in the Fatherland.

Their principle was to bear and to forbear, to labor and hope, and with God's help to rear a permanent home for themselves and their children. Among these early settlers are to be found many of the unknown heroes of the early Province.

When the German emigrant arrived in the Province of Penn after the long and tiresome voyage of the period, and if fortunate enough to escape the clutches of the merciless souldrivers with which the province abounded, reaching in safety the tract which he had purchased often far away from all civilization, yet even before the smoke on the improvised hearth-stone arose above the surrounding tree tops, the fervent prayer of the settler wafted heavenward, asking God's blessing upon the new home in the western wilderness. Their whole trust was placed in the Deity, and there the hardy settler rested fearless and secure, far from home and friends, surrounded by the primeval forest in which lurking savages abounded.

Yet he feared not; secure in his trust, he labored, hoped and prayed.

Trials innumerable beset his path, but all were met and overcome.

If one would ask what did this self-denial, suffering, religious enthusiasm, and labor of the early German Emigrants result in, the query may be answered in a single sentence, viz.: "*The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.*"

It was the religious spirit, the love of industry, the peaceful disposition, together with the sterling honesty for which the Pennsylvania-German is noted, which more than any other influence has placed our great State in the foremost rank of our national constellation.

Nor does the influence wrought by these earlier pioneers rest within the borders of our Commonwealth, but it has spread over the whole country, so that that there is not a single State within the American Union wherein Pennsylvania-German influence is not felt.

At the present day we can form but little conception of the trials which beset the German emigrant in the early days of the Province.

By far the darkest blot upon our provincial history is the period during which existed, under the protection of the law, a system of slavery the victims of which were mainly Germans, who, as the term "slaves" grated harshly on the ears of the meek Quaker or pious churchman, became known as Redemptionists or Redemption servants, a distinction which, however, failed to make the lot of the unfortunates any lighter.

Often lured from their peaceful homes in the Father-

land by the persuasive eloquence of designing agents they gathered up their possessions, and placed their all in the agents' hands and started for the new world, only to find themselves stranded at the seaport, without the means of proceeding on their journey, and in their dire extremity were forced to sign themselves into a period of servitude.

Yet, bad as their situation was, there were even worse cases, where emigrants with their families, who had paid their full fare, upon their arrival under some trivial pretext were sold into bondage, husband and wife separated and taken into different parts of the country miles apart, the children ruthlessly torn from the parents and sold into slavery often worse than death, and all this by the Christian shipowner or churchly consignee in the province of Penn.

When not sold on shipboard the poor creatures, weakened by their long voyage, were herded together and driven through the country like a herd of cattle. Stops were made at every cross-roads tavern to expose the human drove for sale, until all were disposed of. If any lagged or sank down under the fatigue of the journey or the inhuman treatment, the lash of the soul-driver's whip spurred them on until perhaps they fell dead by the wayside.

As a matter of fact the German white slaves of that period were often treated with less consideration than the unfortunate Negro who was bought outright. It is but necessary to scan the advertisements in the papers of the day to get an insight into the situation which once flour-

ished in the Province and before which even negro slavery pales. It is stated as a matter of honorable record, that there is not a single case known where the husband and wife (unless parted by death), failed to reunite at the end of their servitude. Many descendants of these unfortunates are to-day in our midst, men who occupy honored positions in State and society, a living evidence of the true heroism displayed by their ancestors under the most adverse circumstances. In strange contrast the names and families of those who profited by this infamous traffic are in almost every instance lost in oblivion.

The world naturally asks why did these people, with their strong love of liberty, submit? Why did they not rise up against their oppressors and strike for liberty? It is here again where the true heroism of the German settler appears. Resistance meant death or imprisonment, and perhaps a separation forever from all that was dear to the German heart.

Another class of true heroes, not to be forgotten, are the men and women, call them religious enthusiasts if you will, who, a century and a half ago, labored here in Pennsylvania, and devoted their lives to provide places of religious refuge for their scattered and spiritually neglected countrymen. I now refer to the communities at Ephrata, in Lancaster county, and Bethlehem, in Northampton The former, a community of Seventh Day Baptists, after exerting a widespread influence, has long since declined through the peculiar construction of the article in our State Constitution which was supposed to ensure religious liberty, but in this case almost crushed out the

organizations that felt it incumbent to keep the seventh day holy.

Relics of this community may still be seen on the Cocalico in the old brethren and sister house with its adjoining Saal. Although these remnants of a once prosperous community may crumble and soon be no more, the names of the pilgrim preachers, Beissel and Wohlfarth, will not be forgotten in history—two men who, time and again, dared to harangue the Philadelphia Quakers, in meeting and public market place, upon their iniquities, and their treatment of the German settler in Pennsylvania.

Of the other heroic band who settled on the forks of the Delaware and founded Bethlehem I need not speak, as their history is too well known. Men and women who worked, labored, prayed and suffered in common, that the gospel might be free to every resident of the Province, irrespective of race, color or nationality.

Many were the trials of this hero band. Most all rest in the scattered God's acres of the church, a simple numbered breast-stone upon their grave; the books of the church alone recording how many had suffered torture and martyrdom at the hands of the murderous savage.

That their lives were not spent in vain, is evident at the present day, not only in our State and country, but in the missionary stations extending from far off Alaska in the frozen North to torrid Surinam at the Equator, which all bear evidence of the true heroism of the early pioneers on the banks of the Lehigh.

We come now to another class of heroes, viz.: the Lutheran and Reformed clergy, who labored and itiner-

ated throughout the Province, ministering to the sick, baptizing children, comforting the dying, catechizing the youth, correcting errors, and establishing congregations and building churches wherever encouragement was given.

These clergymen were not subsidized by a wealthy corporation, as were the ministers of the church of England. No tithes, government aid or perquisites fell to their lot. Often having to work during the week to support their families, yet we find them preaching on Sundays to congregations at far distant points.

The history of a few of these humble heroes has been written; the greater number, however, like their flock rest in unmarked tombs, while their labors and teachings still live in the influence engendered by their ministrations.

In enumerating the various classes of self-sacrificing heroes of the provincial period, none deserve more credit than the German schoolmaster, the pastor's helper; upon these men devolved not alone the education of the youth, but in the absence of a regular clergyman or in outlying districts, the spiritual cares of the settlers as well. His labors were clearly a labor of love; no salary was attached to his mission, his only stipend being his board, and that often not the best, as was obtained from the parents of the scholars he taught. How onerous were his duties may be gathered from the fact that there are cases on record where a schoolmaster taught in two different places at the same time, serving three days a week in each township.

Even these men did not escape the persecutions to which the Germans were subjected. Thus we find from

an advertisement in the Philadelphia *Mercury*, February, 1737, where a prominent Chester county churchman advertises for sale—"A young Dutchman who understands writing and accounts and lately kept school."

Think of it, fellow members of the Pennsylvania-German Society, this unfortunate teaching school, perhaps instilling the love of liberty in the hearts of his scholars while he himself was held in a state of bondage, subject to the lash at the pleasure of his owner.

What greater heroism can be shown than here exemplified by this humble, unknown schoolmaster. Humble and unfortunate though he was, he was infinitely greater and nobler than the aristocratic church warden who held him in bondage and offered his human body for sale to the highest bidder.

As an other example of the representative schoolmaster it is but necessary to mention the name of the Mennonite "Schulmeister" of the Skippack, Christopher Dock.

This quiet, unassuming man taught school in the vicinity of the Skippack and Germantown for over half a century, during which time he not alone taught his scholars the elementary branches, but moulded their morals and character as well, never forgetting to look after the spiritual welfare of any scholar who had once been under his charge. His labors among the German Mennonites, his writings which have come down to us, among which are a number of hymns still used by the Mennonites in their church service, all speak of the simplicity and true piety of the writer. Well may Christopher Sauer in his "Geistiliches Magazin" call him "den Gottselichen Christopher Dock."

His death in the fall of 1771 was a fitting end to his pious life of heroic self-denial.

After he dismissed his school he was wont to remain for a short time to pray and ask a blessing upon his departing scholars. While thus engaged upon his knees with hands uplifted the dread mandate came, calling him to join the church triumphant.

I doubt whether his resting place is known. No emblazoned monument marks the spot, but the seed he sowed took root and flourishes up to the present day. The victories this hero won are far more important than many gained at the cannon's mouth.

When we come to the Revolutionary period, the charge is often made that during that memorable struggle the majority of Germans were non-combatants, or favorable to the crown. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Granted that many of the German settlers in Pennsylvania were non-combatants, and from religious convictions refused to bear arms. This fact did not make them traitors or antagonistic to the patriot cause.

The main sects or denominations in question were the Seventh Day Baptists, Moravians and Mennonites.

Now who was it that kept the fighting army in the field? It was just this contingent of peaceful Germans in Pennsylvania. Heroes none the less. As a matter of history the commissary stores during the most critical periods of the struggle were most all supplied by these same Pennsylvania-German non-combatants.

The men and farms supplied the subsistence for man and beast, while the women furnished the clothing, quilts

and stockings for the soldiers. It is even said that such of the women as were too old to sew or knit, picked the lint and made bandages for the wounded.

I have seen it stated in an old document of the time (I forget the writer), "that if it were not for the Pennsylvania Dutch women the army could not keep the field a month."

Further, when after disastrous battles the buildings and institutions of these people were seized by the military authorities and turned into hospitals, and the peaceful occupants forced to seek shelter where best they could, as was the case at Ephrata, Bethlehem, Lititz and elsewhere. Did they object? No, they accepted the situation without a murmur, and both men and women as ministers of mercy attended the sick and dying no matter how loathsome or pestilential the disease, in many cases sacrificing their own health and lives for humanity's sake. This was another example of true heroism of the German settler in Pennsylvania. No one ever heard of these people asking for any fee or reward or claiming damages for losses sustained, similar to the Chester County Quakers or Philadelphia Tory, although the buildings, on account of the deadly typhus or camp fever, were unfitted for their original uses and had to be destroyed or abandoned to other purposes.

History thus far has failed to immortalize these humble heroes.

In Ephrata, on the hill above the old Settlement, was to be seen for many years a rough deal board upon which was painted in German fractur schrift the legend: "*Heir*

Ruhen die Gebeine Vieler Soldaten," but not a word or line to indicate where rest those of the Theosophic community who sacrificed their lives for the alleviation of the sufferings of the country's defenders.

At the late Sesqui-Centennial festival at Bethlehem, a memorial stone was unveiled "To the unknown dead who were willing to die that their country might live," marking the burial place of soldiers who died in the general hospital at Bethlehem.

The noble men and women, brethren and sisters of the Unitas Fratrum, who volunteered as nurses and served as hospital attendants during that critical period, and who nursed hundreds of soldiers into recovery, in many cases sacrificing health and life to their self imposed duty, rest in the God's acre on the hill. The breast-stone bears only their number. True heroes, who faced death with greater fortitude and more frequently than many a soldier on the battle field.

In conclusion I have now but to mention the grandest heroic character in Pennsylvania history. I allude to the "German Mother," and what person is there here who would refuse to place a garland of tribute at her feet. She needs no brazen tablet nor granite monument to recount her virtue, nor epic poem to sing her praise. Her memory is enshrined in all our hearts. Ever patient, self denying, devout, industrious, thrifty, her sole aim to raise her family in the fear of the Lord.

Among no other nationality who settled in the province of Penn can you produce her equal. It is due to her influence that the Pennsylvania-German of to-day occupies

his high position in society and state. Her teachings moulded our character and made possible the Commonwealth as it is.

Thus when we speak of the early settlers of our country and admire their courage displayed during their trials and privatious, none loom up grander and nobler than the German settlers and their descendents in Pennsylvania. Men and women, humble though they were, ever law abiding citizens under all circumstances. No matter how oppressive the laws, or harsh their enforcement, loyal, sober, thrifty, peaceful and devout, they laid the foundation of that great distinctive race known as "The Pennsylvania-German," whose influence has made itself felt wherever its representatives are to be found.

In calling your attention to this chapter in our history I have by no means exhausted the subject, and trust that renewed interest may be aroused and abler minds and pens enlisted to do justice to the "True Heroes of Provincial Pennsylvania."